

INITIAL FOREIGN REACTION TO
PRESIDENT JOHNSON'S 7 APRIL ADDRESS

Based on material available

State Dept. review completed

as of 1630 8 April 1965

I. COMMUNIST REACTION

Only brief, initial Soviet accounts of the President's speech are available. The initial monitored report from Peiping labels the President's speech as "one full of lies and fraud." NCNA says that the offer of unconditional discussions is "old stuff with new decorations," and aims at making the South Vietnamese people lay down their arms and permitting the United States to remain in Vietnam. No reaction has come from Hanoi or the Viet Cong radio. Short reports of the speech have been broadcast by the Prague, Warsaw, Budapest, and East Berlin radios. The only other Communist comment is from Cuba.

A. MOSCOW

The initial TASS report notes briefly that the President expressed "the readiness of the United States for negotiations" and "simultaneously emphasized that the United States was going to continue using its military strength 'to keep the conflict from spreading.'"

A short Moscow domestic service report is much the same. Both the TASS and radio reports take note of the President's proposal for an economic development program for southeast Asia, but neither TASS nor Radio Moscow mentions the President's expression of hope that the Soviet Union will join in a development program.

Both Soviet versions of the speech open by stating that the President "accused" the DRV of attacking South Vietnam--"without adducing any proof," the radio adds--and both note that he said the purpose of the air strikes on North Vietnam was to stem aggression. Both report that the President expressed hope for an early peace and at the same time "urged" Americans to be prepared for a long, continued conflict.

The Soviet accounts contain no reference to the 17 nonaligned national initiative on Vietnam.

The Soviet accounts also fail to take notice of the President's references to Communist China.

Diplomats who talked with high-ranking Soviet officials at the Moscow reception for Ayub said their first impression was that Russia's first reaction was that no negotiations are likely to succeed while the US continued to bomb.

They said Russians with whom they talked refused to admit Johnson's statement was a move forward from the previous American position.

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Diplomats doubted a definitive Soviet response to Johnson will be worked out until Communist Party Leonid Brezhnev and Premier Aleksey Kosygin return from Poland this weekend.

B. EASTERN EUROPE

Where Moscow's accounts note only the President's expression of readiness "for negotiations," with no elaboration, the Prague, East Berlin, and Budapest radios specify that he proclaimed US readiness for unconditional negotiations; and Budapest's and East Berlin's reports indicate that his statements responded to the appeal of the 17 nonaligned nations. East Berlin states that the President "limited US readiness for negotiating expressly to governments," adding that Western press agency reports say Washington "obviously is not prepared to negotiate with the South Vietnamese liberation movement."

The East European accounts all, in one way or another, note critically that the President indicated Washington intention to continue the strikes against North Vietnam.

In a newscast report following up its initial account of the speech, the Budapest radio says that "the first commentaries" (unidentified) "point out that essentially it contains nothing new; its only message was that the head of the United States has shown himself willing, in words, to discuss the Southeast Asian situation unconditionally."

A different tack is taken in a followup item from the Czechoslovak news agency, which cites "observers in Washington" as discerning "a marked change in the US attitude on negotiations." One interpretation of the speech, the agency says, is "that the United States would even consider discussing with the CPR, which the observers describe as an interested power." But "this is made difficult by Johnson's refusal to consider the South Vietnamese Liberation Front as a partner in eventual talks,...and there are also some doubts as to whether the CPR and North Vietnam will be interested in negotiations under the present circumstances."

C. CUBA

Havana television commentator Gomez Wanguemart finds nothing in the speech which might provide the basis for peace talks, "within the framework of the Geneva agreements or otherwise." While noting that the speech marks a "modification" of Washington's position on negotiations, the commentator nevertheless states that "under that pacifist appearance" there is the "threat" that the US Government will continue to use force in Vietnam. Gomez Wanguemert dismisses the economic aid program as "bait." In a similar vein, a Havana radio broadcast to the Americans likens the economic development plan "hypocritically" advanced by the President to the "as yet unrealized" Alliance for Progress program.

Havana's PRENSA LATINA subsequently quotes a White House spokesman as stating that the United States is prepared to talk to Communist China about Vietnam, but the agency says the spokesman "made it clear that the US Government apparently does not intend to enter into contact with the South Vietnam Liberation Front."

II. NONCOMMUNIST REACTION

WESTERN EUROPE

A. UK

President Johnson's announcement that the United States is ready for unconditional discussions on Vietnam was welcomed in London as "a statesman-like and imaginative approach," according to Reuters. The agency reports an official statement that the British Government believes the speech offers a framework within which the conflict can be resolved. AFP quotes British diplomatic sources as saying that the President's clarification of US policy should considerably facilitate London's efforts to find a basis for negotiations, and that the "more flexible line" adopted by Washington will strengthen Prime Minister Wilson's position both at home and among the non-aligned members of the commonwealth.

In initial British press comment, the London Evening Standard welcomes the President's "inspiring and statesmanlike" speech as "the most constructive step anyone has taken" toward ending the war. The paper says it is now up to the Communist world to "respond to reason with reason," and it expresses fear that Mr. Johnson's initiative will be "frustrated by niggling objections and provisos and bogged down by international protocol."

B. FRANCE

French Government sources hailed the speech as a new opening and as a step toward peace in Vietnam, according to AFP. The essential point, these sources reportedly said, was US "abandonment of prior conditions" for negotiations. It is felt in Paris, AFP adds, that although Mr. Johnson did not use the word "neutrality" to define the status which Washington wants to see evolve in Vietnam, "his paraphrase amounted to practically the same thing." The fact that the President did not indicate a willingness to talk to the Viet Cong does not facilitate the opening of negotiations, in the view of some of the Paris officials.

Two French papers reviewed by AFP, L'aurore and Combat, wonder whether the Communists will respond positively to the American overture or continue intransigent. If the latter occurs, write L'aurore, it will be "clearly established" before the world that the Communists bear, "even more openly than yesterday," the responsibility for the war. Both papers also note that in such an event the United States will continue its present course with determination.

The influential, independent Le Monde in Paris said America's main problem was to know with whom to open discussions. Le Monde said in a front page editorial: "Washington is ready to negotiate with anybody, except the Viet Cong." It said "this insistence on not wanting to negotiate with the people against whom one is fighting has many precedents in the last 20 years. 'Not only did it retard the hour of peace between France and Vietnam, and between France and Algeria, but it resulted in the weakening of our government's position to a frustrating degree at the very moment when they should have decided on talks. It is a lesson which the United States and China should think about.'"

C. WEST GERMANY

A West German Radio Stuttgart dispatch from Washington says that while the President's conditions for a peace settlement necessarily remain general and do not appear to be new, they deserve attention because they constitute "probably the first clear offer to leave South Vietnam, secured by an agreement, without the protection of American troops." This formula, the radio adds, "would not exclude a South Vietnamese decision for reunification with North Vietnam either." The radio terms Mr. Johnson's economic development program one of "profound, far-reaching importance."

A factual report broadcast by Deutschlandfunk and a news item in Frankfurter Rundschau stress US readiness for unconditional discussions.

D. BELGIUM

The Brussels radio reports a statement by Belgian Deputy Foreign Minister Fayat welcoming

the President's speech as a "positive act" which may become a "happy turning point" in the Vietnamese conflict. The minister said the speech indicates the US Government's "fundamental and clear desire to strive for a lasting peace settlement in Southeast Asia."

E. SWITZERLAND

In Switzerland the Tribune De Geneve said Johnson's speech was open to many interpretations. The paper said Johnson declared himself ready for unconditional talks but also said the US was prepared for a long conflict.

The Tribune said Johnson was trying to demonstrate to Southeast Asians that the "conflict without end" into which Communism had thrown them was vain compared with the benefits the area could draw from peaceful development to which the US would contribute enormous sums.

F. NETHERLANDS

In the Netherlands, the executive committee of the Dutch Party of Labor appealed to the "Communist opponents" to also declare themselves willing to start unconditional discussions.

LATIN AMERICA

In sparse reaction from Latin America so far, a Lima broadcast reports that the US Government has "fundamentally modified" its position on Vietnam, while a Bogota radio report notes that the President's statements on negotiations aroused a "controversy" in the US Congress.

MIDDLE EAST AND AFRICA

A. CAIRO

In available reaction from Middle East transmitters, a Radio Cairo report of the speech highlights the President's announcement that the United States will allocate funds to an economic development program for Southeast Asia and his call to the USSR to participate in such a program. The radio notes US readiness to enter into unconditional negotiations and reports the President as stating that the United States launched air attacks on North Vietnam to "persuade the DRV leaders and all those who commit aggression that America will neither be defeated nor will it retreat."

B. TUNIS

A Tunis radio report notes that official circles in a number of world capitals expressed satisfaction with the President's statements about unconditional negotiations, while the reaction in US Congressional circles was mixed.

C. ALGERIA

A commentary in Alger Republican reviewed by the Algiers radio stresses that the fight in South Vietnam, as in the Congo and in Palestine, is that of "a whole nation against their colonizers," a battle by "nationalists" to "liberate their countries from the foreign occupier and his agents." Thus, the paper says, if President Johnson is ready to negotiate as he affirmed in his speech, "the only thing he has to do is approach the National Liberation Front directly."

D. CENTO

Secretary of State Rusk handed copies of the President's speech to Foreign Ministers of CENTO. One press source said there "appeared to be general support for the American position among members of the Alliance."

FAR EAST

A. SOUTH VIETNAM

South Vietnamese Foreign Minister Iran Van Do said that his government is ready to accept any peace plan as long as the independence of South Vietnam is maintained, according to the Tokyo radio. He told an NHK correspondent in Saigon 8 April that the South Vietnam government does not oppose unconditional discussion of the crisis as proposed by President Johnson, adding that he believes North and South Vietnam can coexist peacefully just as the United States and the Soviet Union are doing.

"Influential circles" in Saigon welcomed the President's policy statement as a realistic approach which meets the desire of the people of both North and South Vietnam. There is nothing to do now but await Hanoi's reaction, they reportedly said. According to Reuters, several South Vietnamese officials privately expressed concern that the speech might have an adverse affect on morale in their country. Some South Vietnamese, Reuters reports, felt that the speech was aimed mainly at placating elements within and outside the United States pressing for peace negotiations. According to the agency, "official quarters" in Saigon expressed the belief that the President has not changed the US position.

(Excerpts) Former South Vietnamese Premier Tran Van Huong said in Paris that the speech contained "positive elements for the Vietnam problem... that one can hope soon for a return to peace."

B. JAPAN

Japanese Prime Minister Sato told the US ambassador in Tokyo that he strongly welcomed the President's clear exposition of US aims in Vietnam fighting and, ultimate hopes and intentions with regards to Southeast Asia and would make clear at a later press conference his hearty approval of statements.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Iomisaburo Hasimoto told newsmen Japan "positively backed" Johnson's efforts.

US readiness to negotiate without prior conditions made big headlines in Tokyo newspapers, but AFP says government sources noted that Mr. Johnson had "in fact rejected" negotiations with the Viet Cong.

A Tokyo radio correspondent in Washington reports that the speech indicates a remarkable change in the US attitude on Vietnam and means that Washington has "virtually accepted" the proposal of the 17 non-aligned nations. The US Government, he says, believes that with this "new policy" it can end its "diplomatic isolation" and place the Communists on the defensive.

C. AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

An Australian Government statement warmly welcomed the President's proposals and said they did not seem to involve any important change in US policy toward Vietnam. New Zealand Prime Minister Holyoake said that US willingness for talks was encouraging.